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ABSTRACT

This guide is intended to answer employers' questions on how to hire and manage workers who have an intellectual impairment. Following an introductory description and definition of intellectual impairment, the guide addresses relevant issues through a series of responses to questions: (1) Do individuals with an intellectual impairment make good employees?; (2) What are their job strengths and weaknesses?; (3) Are there any special considerations for employees who work in jobs requiring contact with customers or the public?; (4) What kinds of jobs can they perform?; (5) Will extra training time or supervision be required?; (6) How can training or supervision be provided without disrupting the flow of activity?; (7) Should an employee with an impairment be treated differently from other employees?; (8) How will co-workers respond to the new employee?; (9) What are the costs associated with hiring intellectually impaired workers?; (10) Will company insurance rates change?; and (11) What are the benefits associated with hiring intellectually impaired workers? Names and addresses of organizations that can supply additional information are provided along with a summary of "keys to success" that encourage employer commitment, education, understanding, and active partnership with vocational rehabilitation specialists and agencies. (VW)

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A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

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HIRING WORKERS

Who Have An

INTELLECTUAL IMPAIRMENT

Steven Dennis
Thomas A. Ebert

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PREFACE

Adults who have an intellectual impairment represent one of Canada's most underutilized labour resources. Estimates of unemployment among qualified workers reach as high as 85 percent even through there is a high demand for workers in many sectors of the employment market. The reason for this is simple enough. Most employers report that they do not know what an individual who has an impairment is capable of doing. This guidebook is intended to describe the capabilities of workers who have an intellectual impairment and the experience of those employers who have accepted these workers into their labour force. The guide then takes a look at how to employ and manage individuals who are ready and willing to meet the needs of the employer.

The contents of this information guide for employers was prepared with the assistance of numerous businesses, rehabilitation centres, government employment agencies and research institutions. We asked business and labour personnel to provide the questions they would like to have answered about hiring an individual with an intellectual impairment. Answers to these questions were then drawn from several knowledgeable sources: from employers who presently hire people who have an intellectual impairment; from researchers in private and public institutions who have amassed more than two decades of training and employment research; from rehabilitation specialists who work daily training people to participate in the competitive labour market; and from people with an intellectual impairment who desire social and economic independence.

Following an introductory description and definition of intellectual impairment the guidebook examines such critical topics as training and supervision, costs and benefits, sources of employer assistance, and most importantly, the ability of workers who have an intellectual impairment to satisfy an employer's prime economic objective for labour – productivity.

Employer awareness of the job capabilities and value of workers who have an intellectual impairment is a goal which we hope this guidebook will help to achieve. We also hope that the information provided will encourage employers to take a step toward opening job opportunities for individuals who eagerly await a chance to demonstrate their abilities.

Steven Dennis and Thomas A. Ebert
Western Industrial Research and Training Centre
January, 1987

DEFINITIONS

What is an intellectual impairment?

Intellectual impairment is a type of nonprogressive disability in which the person functions with less than average mental ability. Based on current estimates, it affects about 3% of the Canadian population or about 800,000 persons[1]. However, the vast majority of these individuals are capable of becoming self-sufficient, contributing members of society[2]. Selective education and training allow them to perform most vocational, social and recreational activities.

The terms "disability" and "handicap" are often used interchangeably when referring to an impairment although they do not mean quite the same thing. The World Health Organization defines *impairment* as a disturbance of or interference with the normal structures and functioning of the body, including the systems of mental functioning. *Disability* is the loss or reduction of functional ability or activity that results from impairment. *Handicap* is the disadvantage that results from impairment and disability[3]. An *intellectual impairment,* then, is a mental disability characterized by slower than average ability to learn, while mental handicap refers to the effects of this slower learning rate. Examples of mental handicap may include difficulty in following complex verbal instructions, reduced ability to express oneself verbally, and limited skills in reading, arithmetic, and problem solving. The important thing to remember is that, with adequate training, the effects of the disability on the job, that is, the handicap, can virtually disappear.

JOB CAPABILITIES

Do individuals with an intellectual impairment make good employees?

Fortune 500 companies responding to a survey conducted by the *Journal of Contemporary Business* clearly state that the most important factors influencing their decision to hire an individual with a disability are job performance and job productivity[4]. Nothing else comes close.

The *DuPont* study of 1973, in which the job performance records of nearly 1,500 workers were evaluated, is the most frequently cited study of the quality of workers who are disabled[5]. On all measures of job performance, safety, job stability and attendance, workers with a disability were rated

average or above average when compared to their nondisabled co-workers. Investigators also found that employees were highly motivated towards all aspects of good job performance. Presumably, they had an acute awareness that employment is an earned privilege that cannot be taken for granted.

Since the landmark *DuPont* study, other studies have confirmed these findings[6,7]. Employers report that qualified workers who have an intellectual impairment, and who are suitably matched to the job, perform as efficiently and as safely as nondisabled workers. And what makes these employees even more attractive, according to employers, are high levels of job satisfaction, and consequently, reduced turnover and absenteeism rates[7]. Especially in businesses and industries where high turnover rates are usual, the training and hiring of workers who have an intellectual impairment makes good economic sense.

What are their job strengths and weaknesses?

Co-workers', supervisors', and employers' perceptions of the job strengths and weaknesses of employers with intellectual impairments consistently show high levels of agreement in several areas. In addition to being seen as capable workers, reliability, dependability and a strong desire to do well invariably top the list of positive qualities. As with nondisabled workers, however, there will be individual variation in motivation.

An inability to readily change routines or to make independent judgements about tasks outside of a routine are frequently cited as the most prominent job weaknesses. Structure and routine are important job characteristics for most employees who have an intellectual impairment, and each new job will normally require additional training and supervision until the task is mastered.

Are there any special considerations for employees who work in jobs requiring contact with customers or the public?

Jobs which involve dealing with customers or the general public usually call for a friendly, helpful attitude on the part of the worker plus the ability to make judgements about which requests or inquiries should be referred elsewhere and to whom. Like nondisabled workers, skill in these areas will vary from person to person. It is sometimes difficult for the individual who has an intellectual impairment to make judgements about the appropriateness of requests made by the public which fall outside normal

job requirements. For this reason, employers need to offer specific guidelines for behavior when the employee is requested to perform extra duties by persons other than a direct supervisor.

What kinds of jobs can they perform?

Qualified adults who have received appropriate training can perform well in a broad variety of jobs. Service industries, hospitals, manufacturing and the wholesale/retail trade are just some types of businesses where individuals with an intellectual impairment are employed successfully. Some examples of specific jobs currently held by workers with an intellectual impairment include:

* animal caretaker
* auto attendant
* baker's helper
* bus person
* day care assistant
* farm worker
* file clerk
* general labourer
* hairstyling assistant
* health care aide
* janitor and housekeeper
* kitchen assistant
* laundry worker
* machine operator
* mail clerk
* material packager
* mechanic's assistant
* messenger
* photocopier
* receptionist
* trades assistant
* warehouse or stock person

TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

Will extra training time or supervision be required?

The first few weeks are an important accommodation period for any new employee because the entire work environment may be a new one. This time period is especially critical for the employee who has an intellectual impairment because of the variety and number of new things to learn. Since their rate of learning is slower, additional training time is usually required.

Most important is how the training is done. A person with an intellectual impairment will learn best when instructions are concrete and specific. One of the easiest and most effective training methods is simply a step-by-step demonstration procedure followed by supervised practice. Thereafter, repetition and occasional reinforcement for good performance will help to ensure job mastery.

Extensive written instructions, such as policy and procedure manuals, are of little value to persons whose reading skills may be minimal. Verbal explanations or pictorial reminders of job functions are effective substitutes for written instructions.

Once the employee has mastered the job the amount of on-going supervision time will seldom be significantly greater than for any other employee. An exception to this situation may exist when an individual must work independently for prolonged periods of time with little or no co-worker or supervisor contact and, of course, future changes in the job or in job expectations will necessitate a retraining session.

How can training or supervision be provided without disrupting the flow of activity?

Many employers prefer to use the training services of job placement specialists or rehabilitation counsellors who work for nonprofit job placement agencies, vocational training facilities, or employment centres. In most instances, where an agency approaches the employer about meeting their labour needs, agency personnel will also be able to satisfy the employer's training requirements.

Typical services include job analysis, referral of employees who are appropriate for the job, on-site training and supervision, and provision of information or other assistance to make the employee orientation period go smoothly. Rehabilitation personnel can also provide follow-up services to assist the employee or employer should concerns arise after an individual is hired. Job placement specialists welcome the opportunity to assist the employer, whether for only a few hours or a few weeks. Most agencies will provide services to both employers and employees free of charge.

If there is no referring agency, employers may arrange for assistance or referral to an agency by calling the Special Needs Branch of Canada Employment and Immigration, the local Manpower office or provincial associations for persons with disabilities. A list of these information sources is provided in the "Employer Assistance" section of the guidebook.

Other employers have successfully implemented a volunteer "buddy system" whereby an experienced employee serves as a job coach or a guide to the new employee for a period of time. The experienced employee can help to resolve issues or concerns as they arise, explain company policies and procedures, and help to make the new employee

feel like part of the team. Company recognition of the responsibility entailed in assisting a new employee can also mean additional job status for the volunteer job coach.

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Should an employee with an impairment be treated differently from other employees?

People who have an intellectual impairment appreciate being treated like anyone else. They are perceptive in knowing how others view them, even though they may not be able to fully describe their feelings, and like the rest of us, they will react accordingly. Having succeeded in their educational or vocational training programs, they will also expect the same job demands as their co-workers, and will anticipate receiving the same rewards.

It is essential that all employees are subject to the same policies, procedures and guidelines established by the company. There is no need to implement a different set of rules. Whether the individual receives recognition for exceptional performance or a reprimand for poor performance, all employees should be respected equally.

How will co-workers respond to the new employee?

It is a good personnel practice to offer an orientation session for co-workers who may not be knowledgeable about intellectual impairment prior to the new employee's appearance on the job. An occasion on which employees are encouraged to candidly voice their concerns or to ask questions is a good opportunity to resolve any misperceptions, to reduce anxieties, and to set the stage for a positive reception of the new employee.

For many employees this may be the first time that they have been asked to judge an individual who has an impairment on the basis of their abilities rather than their disabilities, or to realize that a person who is intellectually impaired can also be a competent worker. Discomfort or apprehension are common initial reactions when the focus is on the handicap but such feelings almost always dissipate as people come to know each other.

Companies which are experienced in employing workers who have an impairment invariably report that the key to co-worker acceptance is personal contact, and the more frequent the interaction the more positive the results. It is actual exposure to the individual that results in positive and constructive relationships between co-workers.

COSTS AND BENEFITS

What are the costs associated with hiring workers who have an intellectual impairment?

The most significant up-front cost to the employer who has not previously hired people who have an intellectual impairment is the time it takes to become aware of their value as employees. While information booklets like this one may streamline the process, the time investment can only be made by the employer.

A related time-and-effort cost is that associated with developing a positive working relationship with those rehabilitation specialists, employment agencies or service providers who are knowledgeable about disabilities. Employers who are among the most successful in establishing employees who have an impairment into their workforce are also people who have built a strong partnership with vocational rehabilitation professionals who can both understand and meet employer needs. Of course, most companies quickly develop their own expertise in training and hiring workers who have an impairment but for many new ventures the probability of a successful outcome can be greatly enhanced by consultation with rehabilitation professionals.

Additional costs are incurred once a decision to hire has been made. Although the new employee will most likely have received, and graduated from, a work skills training program, he or she will invariably require some additional on-the-job training. Learning specific job duties, company policies, performance expectations and other specific details that vary from one employment setting to another will all require the attention of a training supervisor. However, these costs can be reduced by using the training services of a vocational rehabilitation agency.

Finally, the employer should make some provision for a staff orientation session.

Will company insurance rates change?

The *Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association* has confirmed that premiums for group benefit policies are based on the general characteristics of the insured group. Important factors considered by insurance companies are the age and sex of the employees, earnings, type of occupation, and the like. An individual's intellectual skills have no bearing on the setting of insurance rates. In fact, statistics indicate that workers who

have an intellectual impairment actually help to keep insurance rates down because of their excellent safety records[9].

Insurance costs for disability coverage are also influenced by the overall performance of the company in the type of business that it conducts. This holds true for both private insurers and the Workers' Compensation Board.

Disability claims arising from a work injury are limited to the injury caused by the specific incident. Employees who have a pre-existing disability generally may not make a claim relating to the previously existing condition. In some cases, an exclusionary clause may deny the individual disability coverage but this does not exclude them from employment. The individual insurer can clarify specific cases.

What are the benefits associated with hiring workers who have an intellectual impairment?

The investment of training and hiring of workers who have an impairment can pay handsome dividends in several ways. Employers who access the services of rehabilitation professionals, for example, can expect to reduce their standard recruitment and training costs for all those jobs for which qualified workers are eligible to compete. When we consider that training for many entry level positions can cost in the hundreds of dollars because of high turnover rates, an employer can realize savings in their recruitment and training budget.

Stabilizing high turnover positions is another economic benefit that many employers will appreciate. Where workers with an intellectual impairment have filled many entry level positions, high turnover rates in those jobs are now the exception rather that the rule[10]. A recent report describing the job maintenance records of over 2,000 workers in service occupations provides a poignant example. In comparison to an industry average of less than 5 months job retention, employees with an intellectual impairment have remained on the job for an average of 19 months, and are still counting[11]. Moreover, studies show that absenteeism rates and incidences of malingering are also lower for workers who have an impairment[12,13]. The difference is in job satisfaction and appreciation of an employment opportunity.

Job stability among these workers has been a major factor in the decision of many companies, including such notables as *McDonalds, Holiday Inns,* and the *Marriott Corporation,* to implement training and employment programs. This was also one of the reasons why the *National Restaurant*

Association and the *American Hospital Association* initiated a program to hire some 36,000 U.S. workers who are disabled [14].

EMPLOYER ASSISTANCE

Where can I get assistance or more information?

CANADA EMPLOYMENT AND IMMIGRATION
Contact the Manager of your local Canada Employment Centre for information on available employer assistance programs. An explanation of your particular situation and concerns will result in appropriate referrals for assistance.

PROVINCIAL – SOCIAL SERVICES
Your local Social Services office can assist you with a referral to a rehabilitation agency providing job training, job placement and other services that an employer may request.

PROVINCIAL – MANPOWER
Contact your local Manpower office for information on job creation programs, training programs, wage subsidies, technical aids or assistance in building modifications and other services offered to employers.

ASSOCIATIONS
Provincial associations can also assist you with a referral to a local rehabilitation agency.

Alberta Association for Community Living
11728 Kingsway Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5G 0X5
(403) 451-3055

Alberta Association of Rehabilitation Centres
Box 105, 2725 - 12 Street N.E.
Calgary, Alberta
T2E 7J2
(403) 250-9495

Association du Quebec pour les Deficients Mentaux
3440, avenue de l'Hotel-de-Ville, 2me etage
Montreal, Quebec
H2X 3B4
(514) 849-3616

Association for Community Living – Manitoba
#1 - 90 Market Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3B 3P3
(204) 947-1118

British Columbians for Mentally Handicapped People
1027 West Broadway
Vancouver, British Columbia
V6H 3Z2
(604) 732-7222

Canadian Association for Community Living and G. Allan Roeher Institute
Kinsmen Building, York University Campus
4700 Keele Street
Downsview, Ontario
M3J 1P3
(416) 661-9611

Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded
Nova Scotia Division
83 Portland Street
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia
B2Y 1H5
(902) 469-1174

Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded
Prince Edward Island Division
P.O. Box 280
Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island
C1A 7K5
(902) 566-4844

Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work
209 - 93 Lombard Avenue East
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3B 3B1
(204) 942-4862

Manitoba Council on Rehabilitation and Work
960 Portage Avenue, Room 208
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3G 0R4
(204) 775-8433

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HIRING WORKERS Who Have An INTELLECTUAL IMPAIRMENT

New Brunswick Association for Community Living
86 York Street, 2nd Floor
Fredericton, New Brunswick
E3B 3N5
(506) 458-8866

Newfoundland Association for Community Living
P. O. Box 5453
St. John's, Newfoundland
A1C 5W4
(709) 722-0790

Ontario Association for the Mentally Retarded
1376 Bayview Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
M4G 3A3
(416) 483-4348

Ontario Rehabilitation and Work Council
32 Kern Road
Don Mills, Ontario
M3B 1T1
(416) 445-0346

Saskatchewan Association for the Mentally Retarded
3031 Louise Street
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7J 3L1
(306) 955-3344

Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres
140 Avenue "F" North
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7L 1V8
(306) 933-0616

Yukon Association for Special Needs People
Box 4853
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 4N6
(403) 667-4606

KEYS TO SUCCESS

The previous pages have conveyed much information in response to frequently asked questions about the employability of adults who have an intellectual impairment. In the final analysis, however, there are really only four considerations necessary to guarantee the success of an employment program for persons who have an intellectual impairment.

First and foremost is employer commitment. An employer who recognizes the mutual benefits of employing a worker who has an intellectual impairment will meet this challenge with patience and a positive outlook that will be readily conveyed to other staff.

Second, the committed employer will realize that co-worker education is the next important consideration to ensure success. Co-workers who understand the nature of an intellectual impairment will feel very accepting of a worker who has an impairment and will be motivated to respond positively. Knowing that the worker with an impairment will be given the same consideration as themselves, but no more, will also promote positive attitudes.

The third key to successful employment is employer understanding and appreciation of the value of obtaining a good match between job characteristics and worker strengths. Structure and routine, although rejected by many workers, may be the very job qualities which promote the best performance by an employee who has an intellectual impairment.

Finally, successful employment programs can be facilitated through active partnership between business and rehabilitation. Vocational rehabilitation specialists experienced in training and job placement can provide invaluable assistance to employers; in return, they can profit from the knowledge and experience of employers as validators of their training programs.

These, then, are the essential ingredients for successful employment of workers with intellectual impairments: employer commitment to the idea, co-worker education, understanding of employee characteristics, and partnership with rehabilitation.

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